Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
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FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 23rd September 2012, 6.00AM: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park.
Planned and started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, the park now houses considerable numbers of Cheetal. As for birding, there should be several small woodland birds, some ground birds like Partridges and Stone Curlew and, perhaps, even a Nightjar. Short-toed Snake Eagles have nested in this park earlier.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Mr. Shafaat Ulla (98492-29552) or Mrs. Shanti Mani (93910-08302).

INDOOR MEETING: VULTURES ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION?
Thursday, 6th September 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

Vultures in the Indian subcontinent and South-East Asia have declined catastrophically during the last decade, and current populations are estimated to be less than 2 % of the original. The main reason for this decline appears to be the use of the veterinary drug, Diclofenac, which is used to treat cattle. Andhra Pradesh had six species of vultures but this number has reduced to a few species and a few individuals.

Dr. G. Umapathy, a senior scientist in the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, will talk to us about the current status and distribution of vultures in Andhra Pradesh, *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation and management issues. He has more than 20 years experience in the field of wildlife research and conservation of endangered species. His research interests are conservation and management of small populations in fragmented landscape, conservation breeding using assisted reproductive techniques and wildlife endocrinology.

INDOOR MEETING: TALK ON BIO-DIVERSITY
Thursday, 20th September 2012, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443)

This talk by Mr. S. Ashok Kumar touches upon the broad contours of bio-diversity in our state and country; bio-resources; salient features of the Biological Diversity Act; Patent Laws; bio-piracy cases in India and other countries and success stories in benefit sharing.

Mr. Ashok Kumar is a life member of BSAP. An expert on butterflies as well, he is the Vice-President of the AP Butterfly Conservation Society. He is a member of the AP State Wildlife Advisory Board and a member of the Advisory Council of WWF – AP Chapter.

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest – 16th August 2012

Jayati Mitra

Ananthagiri Hills is not a new place for me as a birder. The very idea of revisiting this forest delighted me as I reminisced over the recent visit during spring. We started a little late and the weather was cloudy throughout the journey. For company I had Mr. Kevin who had become a member more than twenty years back and was joining the BSAP field trip after a long gap. It was interesting to hear from him that Sanjeevaiah Park was a beautiful birding spot in those days when the present Necklace Road had not yet been constructed.

Report - Indoor Meeting – 20th September 2012

BIO-RESOURCE, BIO-DIVERSITY AND BIO-PIRACY: ON THE EDGE OF LIFE

Urmimala Chatterjee

Mr S Ashok Kumar gave a well informed and a comprehensive talk on the meaning and implications of bio-piracy in a world diminished of bio-resource and bio-diversity.

Mr Ashok Kumar is an acknowledged authority, being a member of the State Wildlife Advisory Board and an Advisory Council member to the World Wildlife Fund, Andhra Pradesh chapter. His talk was one of erudition and reflection upon the practice of bio-piracy and of the consequent preservation in an economic order driven by conquest, greed and domination.

Man cannot recreate a forest

The key point of the talk could be aptly summed in a single line: "Man cannot recreate a forest." When a tree or a plant disappears or dies out, it takes with it 10-30 dependent species such as insects, higher mammals and other plants. A microcosm is devastated – lost forever. Communities that live close to the natural world disappear as well or become depleted in their lives.

Of primary concern has been the patenting of the bio-resources of the naturally rich, lush tropical countries or, in other words, the countries always labeled as the Third World. As Mr Ashok Kumar stated repeatedly throughout - "they steal from us and they bleed us", referring to the practices of the civilized first world.

What is bio-resource?

Bio-resources are resources of nature in that they are genetic resources, organism populations and other biotic components of the ecosystems - in other words, the lush, wild world around us and everything in it and on it.

What is bio-diversity?

Bio-diversity is a component of bio-resource. It is the sum total of flora and fauna, of mammals, domesticated animals, birds, reptiles, profusion of wild and cultivated plants, sheer varieties (species diversity) and variables (genetic diversity) – germ plasm that Nature has in her kitty.

In India, there are 12 mega bio-diversity centres with 22 hotspots. Andhra Pradesh is fourth in terms of bio-diversity – having 81 mammal and 452 bird species. There is one tiger reserve in the state, five national parks, and 26 wildlife sanctuaries which are host to a number of rare and disappearing species of birds and animals. Among them are the Indian Gaur, Indian gazelle, sloth bear, wild dog, painted stork, the Great Indian Bustard. The smooth coated otter is found in Kolleru.

Following the Rio convention, India was the second country after Brazil to enact the Biological Diversity Act

The Great Indian Bustard is a rare bird – their numbers add up to only 120 in Sri Lankamalleshwaram, Reddipally in Kadapa district. The Slender Loris is found in Sri Venkateswara while elephants that roam there cross over from Tamil Nadu.

The Kolleru lake is a sanctuary and a stopover for migratory birds whose number diminish with every passing year. It is also a threatened sanctuary. The Pulicat Lake, which is the largest lagoon in South Asia, is in the same state.

What is traditional knowledge?

Traditional Knowledge is born of the earth in observation and practice of the natural world. Traditional Knowledge is about agricultural and medicinal practices passed on by word of mouth. They constitute stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural beliefs, rituals, community laws, ancient scriptures and what have you!

In traditional knowledge, there is need to codify and document to protect the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities and help them have access to equitable benefit sharing.

What is bio-piracy?

Bio-piracy is the appropriation of bio-resources and bio-diversity without prior intimation and informed consent. Patent is the process of establishing rights upon usage of the name and constituents of the material patented; a process often misused for the appropriation of the bio-resource and traditional knowledge systems of the countries of the South and using it and trading on it with another name, another package and amassing profits by selling it to those countries from where the knowledge actually originated.

An area of 2,00,000 hectares of rain forest in South America was destroyed to meet Germany's timber demand. In another part of the world, in India, Goa was stripped of iron ore to feed Japan's steel mills.

Global Policy Initiatives

Against such a way of life in a world ruled by greed, initiation towards action and justice is masked in opportunistic and ulterior motives. Nonetheless, in The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Rio di Janeiro in 1992 there was clamour for protecting bio-resources by the affected countries. A total of 123 countries including India signed the CBD but, it must be mentioned, not the USA.

2002. In India, the Act has 12 chapters and 65 sections. The Act has formulated a three-tier system of functioning.

The law enforcement bodies are the National Bio-diversity Authority, the State Bio-diversity Management Committee and a Local *Panchayat*.

An indispensable part of this mode of functioning has been the chronicling of traditional knowledge relating to the bio-diversity of the area.

Patent Laws: Plethora of Misuse

Patent laws are meant to protect the integrity of the knowledge source and resource base but in practice something else happens. Essentially, what patent laws do is to take a resource and patent it elsewhere.

Bt cotton was patented by Monsanto and sold to 60 companies across the world. They were then sold at high rates to farmers in countries like India. Subsequently, soils were leached of nutrients, farmers driven to debt and suicide because the inputs were pitilessly high and, in comparison, the returns were terribly inadequate - besides, of course, making the land useless for years to come.

In India, every plant, root, fibre and flower is known for use in wellness, illness, on ceremony and occasion. The values and virtues of herbs and plants of *pudina, kalamegha*, turmeric, *ashwagandha,* ginger, *zeera*, onion have been extolled in the ancient Sanskrit texts of *Astanga Samagraha*, *Yoga Ratnakara* and *Tarangini* of the fifth century. China's attempt to patent *pudina* and *kalamegha* were foiled by India. There have been 32 patents for turmeric. In another case, patents for all the systems of medicine - of Ayurveda and Unani have been revoked.

Patents for *jamun*, bitter gourd, *gur*, egg plant, *basmati, methi, kala jeera* – have all been contested by India. There have been battles for patents on 200 medicinal plants that are India's by right. Their knowledge, their use and their natural area of growth DO NOT belong elsewhere. There are thefts happening all the time – by companies and by individuals who creep into the country to destroy by stealth and cunning. A Swiss MNC's ploy to patent cows' milk from India was foiled in 2011. Yoga, which is the physical and spiritual practice of India, has 168 patents in the selling of yoga devices, mattresses and socks. The USA is selling yoga accessories.

Where does the future lie?

Given the current trends and the avarice how can we transform the present world order? How do we preserve our rich, natural legacy? How do we preserve our age-old wisdom and try and create newer wisdoms? Where is the way out? How can we live without our natural world? Yes, there are other movements at work, other currents of thought that run counter to what is happening all around. So, is there a way out or is there not?

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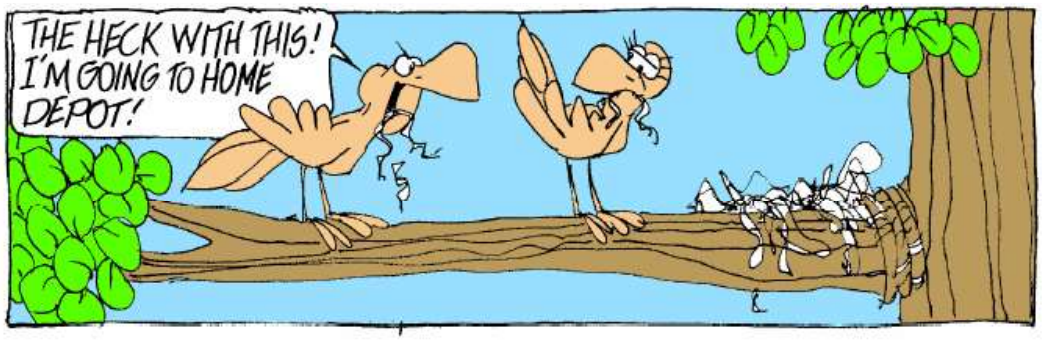
Bird Humour



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